Works by the New Society of Artists

The Secessionist Group Settled in Its Stride

By Royal Cortissoz

Antiquity is in the foreground at the moment. There is no local exhibition quite so imposing as the one at the American Art Galleries of the collection of furniture, tapestries and similar objects belonging to Charles of London. This is indeed a remarkable assemblage of beautiful things, a fascinating demonstration of the art of the past. Nevertheless, it is plain that the moderns are to have their innings this season and especially that the American artist is to have every chance in the world. The galleries in New York already afford numerous opportunities for observation of what our own men have lately been doing.

Aggressive Painters

A Company of Men Interested in Ideas

When the Society of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers made its début at the Gimpel and Wildenstein gallery a year ago, it came upon the scene under a secessionist banner. The members had got together because they were not satisfied with conditions at the Academy and elsewhere. There was nothing professedly revolutionary about their program, but it was apparent that they stood for independence. Before their show opened we wondered if its prevailing tendency would be conservative or radical. It turned out to be a kind of "middle of the road" affair. That is to say, it contained progressive work, but there was nothing in it to disconcert an academic jury. On the whole, a really instructive test seemed to require still another exhibition. In a second year it seemed likely that this body of artists would more conclusively "find itself." It has done so. Under a new name, the New Society of Artists, it makes at the same gallery its second annual exhibition. It has settled into its stride. And it has proved that it has come to stay.

There are a few pictures here which raise a pointed question as to the society's policy, and in raising it give the right answer. Is only new work to be shown? Apparently the members are to be given a certain latitude. Mr. Childe Hassam, for example, sends one small figure subject which he painted thirty years ago, and both of his other exhibits are likewise of old dates. But all these three pictures are good pictures. Evidently the society has chosen as an important element in its policy that consideration for the public which we have always maintained to be worth while. It does not seek a cheap popularity. But it recognizes the fact that an exhibition of pictures should be made of genuine interest, not a mere concatenation of more or less plausible experiments having nothing save newness to say for themselves. It may seem an odd thing to remark about a show that every man represented in it has endeavored to give us of his best. That ought to be taken as a matter of course. But it isn't always a matter of course, not by any means, and we count it as a definite merit of this exhibition that the men who have made it take their opportunity seriously.

This is another way of saying that they take their art seriously. Whether they have all produced masterpieces or not is beside the point. Nobody in his senses would expect anything of the sort. What matters is that they give us something to think about. There is a somewhat unfortunate provocation in the canvas which rightly fills one of the places of honor. It is at the same time, from a certain point of view, one of the failures on the walls. This is the triple portrait, "Eleanor, Joan and Anna," by Mr. George Bellows. In his direct seizure of what he sees in life he is wont to hurt the claims of design and he has treated them most cavalierly in the present instance. His little girl seated between two old women is linked neither to the one nor the other by any device of composition. The canvas has no unity at all. It might be a fragment cut from a reel of some movie film. To that extent it seems a failure. But then when the observer examines, each by itself, the three episodes flung upon the canvas he rejoices in the brilliant technique they disclose. The heads and hands are beautifully painted. There is a lot of life in this portrait and there is some art. If only there were more art!

Much of the portraiture, by the way, leaves this rather mixed impression. Instead of the given canvas being "all of a piece" it has some phase or suggests some mission which promotes dissatisfaction. In a conspicuous position, similar to that which has been given to Mr. Bellows, there hangs a large double portrait by Mr. Gari Melchers. It is called "Winged Victory," but the little plaster cast from which it takes its title stands almost unobserved on the mantlepiece which fills a great deal of the space and the composition is really given to two young women whose garments repeat the rather assertive appeal made in the decorative factors of the room as a room. Now one can see what Mr. Melchers was driving at. He meant, we take it, to paint another of those pictures in which he has extorted delightfully bright and even gay effects from textures and patterns skillfully handled. But for some reason he has this time granted himself an extraordinary scale. In the result he has diffused the notes of his harmony till there is next to no harmony at all, and in a mode of painting which demands the caressing of pigment to a point where it yields quality he has missed that boon and come very near to crudity in its place. The conception is charming, but, attempted on so large a canvas, charm has evaporated. These things are risky. Velasquez can take a seven-foot canvas and fill an astonishing proportion of it with costume. When he gets through the magic of his painted surface validates his theme. Without a magical surface the artist is terribly handicapped.

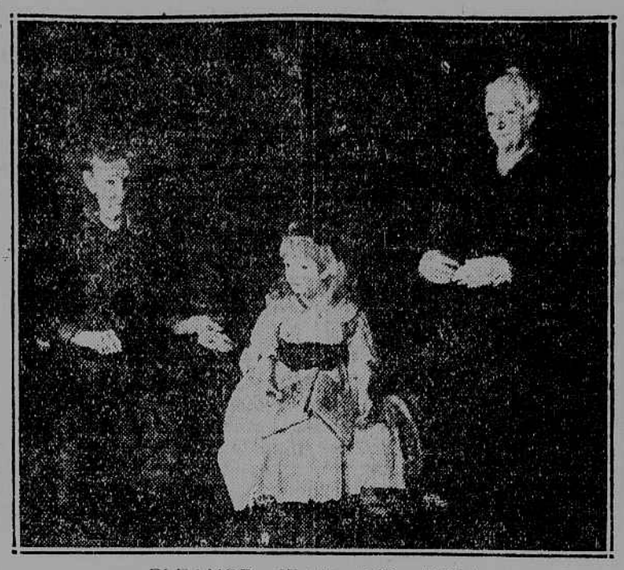
Mr. Edmund C. Tarbell is in this sad case in his "Mary, Edmund and Sergius II." He is accomplished and graceful, after his familiar fashion, but figures and background alike give us a feeling of nothing but so much upholstery. We draw a little nearer to the realization of a painter's aim when we come to Mr. Albert Sterner's "Portrait of Dr. Richard H. Hoffman." He has set out to achieve a certain quality of tone, based on a simple, admirably restrained scheme of color, and here at last is a canvas "all of a piece." It leaves in its turn a little something to be desired. In the painter's solicitude for his patina, so to say, he has forgotten the potency of the accent which is not only permissible, but desirable in work of the kind, as witness the tradition of either Whistler or Ver Meer. But unity is a good thing, and this well drawn, well arranged composition, in which color and form are governed by a conscious purpose, is peculiarly welcome. There are several portraits which excite sympathy through a certain full-bodied realism and vigor of workmanship. Mr. Leon Kroll's "M. Jules Guillaume" is one of them, a handsome, vitalized performance. Mr. George Luks's "Flapper" is another. Mr. Luks goes on painting by main strength and we groan again because his dark pigment is not somehow refined and made lovely, but at any rate there is a kind of biting force about the impression he conveys. There is no force at all about the full length of Mr. Hampden as Hamlet which Mr. W. J. Glackens has produced. One can imagine his drift. He had a poetic subject and he tried in his way to poetize it. But he needed in the process so purely technical a gift as that which we keep missing in Mr. Luks—the gift to make black or gray ring upon canvas.

Are we asking, we wonder, too much? To make paint beautiful in itself is, one must admit, the rarest of accomplishments. One must be content, perhaps, when the medium is at least handled crisply, deftly, with a certain easy efficiency. There is plenty of that sort of thing in the show. There is Mr. Robert Henri's semi-nude "Chinese Jacket," which for delicate precision of touch is, we verily believe, the best thing he ever did in his life. There are some clever bits of painting done in the West by Mr. Randall Davey. There is an engaging example of the facility of Mr. Irving R. Wiles in his "Souvenirs." These things may not be enchanting, but they are well done. We make the same reflection in the presence of the little nude, "First Pose," by Mr. Guy Pene du Bois. He has been too absorbed in his technical problem to give much thought to what we may call the æsthetic issue in his composition. He has not made a beautiful picture. But he has made an uncommonly effective essay in workmanship, a piece of really adroit and solid painting. The modernists, the younger, more adventurous group, come off rather better than might have been expected. They move us to allude again to that effort which we have noted on the part of contributors to send of their best. Mr. Henry L. McFee has never done before so persuasive a thing as his "Portrait of a Painter," and Mr. Samuel Halpert is equally above his average. Mr. John Sloan is hardly to be reckoned among the modernists, but he is, on the other hand, a stout opponent of convention. He has often a disconcerting way of landing upon ugliness. On this occasion, in his "Bleecker Street, Saturday Night," he has some passages of fine painting.

Convention creeps in, of course. It will get in anywhere. So we have to have in this exhibition the incongruity of Mr. Frederick C. Frieseke's pretty "Peace." It is too pretty, too mannered, by half. But this, as we have already shown, is not the characteristic note of the show. We turn now to the open air men and find them all doing spirited, unconventional work, good work, full of light and air. There is one new sensation provided, by Mr. Paul Dougherty. He has been in Spain and the south of France, and on the coast has painted his "St. Jean de Luz." It is as though he had opened a door on a previously unexplored world and had found an inspiration there, jolting him out of an old habit of color and even of style. The painting marks a stride ahead for him. So, too, has Mr. Elmer Schofield done in his gray "Landscape" something unaccustomed, with enhanced vitality and interest. There are capital pieces by Gifford Beal and Reynolds Beal, Rockwell Kent and Ernest Lawson, Van Perrine and Hayley Lever. Mr. Jonas Lie sends a curiously disappointing marine. We are surprised, because he has another picture on view elsewhere this week which is infinitely better. There is one purely decorative contributor, Mr. Robert W. Chanler, represented by three panels grouped under the title of "Phantasy." He has painted birds, fowls and reeds against backgrounds of gold as he has never painted anything before, with a better sense of design and a firmer touch.

The black and whites and the water colors make a little collection by themselves, in which there are a few excellent things, notably some chalk drawings by Mr. Perrine; but apart from the painters the sculptors have most to do with the success of the show. There is a strange factor in this group, Mr. Gaston Lachaise. He has made his talent manifest before, but always he provokes reservations and on the present occasion he invites the same dual judgment. The linear quality of his tall statue, "Woman," is undeniably impressive. The man can model the nude. But as a creative designer he is given, to speak paradoxically, to a deplorable formula. His conception of beauty, if it is a conception of beauty, gives us an ugly, fleshy type which almost obliterates appreciation of his technical dexterity. There is, we submit, something to be said for the hypothesis that one at any rate of the functions of art is so to exalt and transmogrify the facts of nature as to kindle the imagination and awake delight. It is easy enough to see how the thing is done in this very exhibition. Consider the exquisiteness of Mr. James E. Fraser's "Mask." How purely bewitching the thing is! Look also at the suave, beguiling elegance which Mr. Mahonri Young has secured in his bust, "Cecilia Sharp Young," which one would call an echo of the Renaissance if it were not so clearly modern in its spirit. The craftsmanship of the Renaissance is revived in Mr. Paul Manship's "Salome." A more modern and a racier quality appears in the excellent bust and characterful statuettes by Mr. Edmond T. Quinn. The conspicuous exemplar of grace and polish in the treatment of form is Mr. Stirling Calder. In portraiture we must note among the sculptures also Mr. John Flanagan's admirable little "Head of Walt Whitman." There is a single drollery on view, Mr. Elie Nadelman's "Woman Seated." It marks one of the few points where the society seems rather to overdo its desire to keep abreast of late movements. It is on safer ground when it denotes its progressivism by showing an interesting bust like Mr. Maurice Sterne's "Senta." But we cannot quarrel with even the lapses in this collection. The essential point is that the New Society of Artists is stimulating.

AUGUST DAY
(From the painting by Leon Kroll at the New Society)



ELEANOR, JEAN AND ANNA
(From the painting by George Bellows at the New Society)

PORTRAIT IN WHITE
(From the painting by Degas in the Seligmann collection)

THE DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHA
(From the painting by Degas in the Seligmann collection)

Howard Leigh

An American Draftsman in France

Years ago, when the pen draftsman was on velvet, in the magazines, he did yeoman's work in establishing something like a fashion in the treatment of architecture. He drew buildings in a way that looked perfectly enchanting in the magazines aforesaid. Herbert Railton, in England, and Joseph Pennell, in the United States, poured forth a flood of extraordinarily successful illustrations. Their influence was both good and bad. They themselves often deviated into a thin, lacelike effect, which was pretty but specious, and their disciples were prone to carry this altogether too far. Lovers of architecture as it is delineated in drawings and prints became more and more exacting, for they saw the integrity of their beloved art disappearing behind a screen of superficial bedizenments. They have learned to look out with a particular solicitude for the draftsman who depicts architecture with a true appreciation of its genius.

Such a draftsman is young Mr. Howard Leigh, who is making an exhibition at the Anderson Galleries of lithographs drawn in France from monuments scarred by the World War. We mention his youth not only because it is emphasized in Mr. J. B. Carrigan's agreeable introduction to the catalogue but because it is obvious in his work. The draftsman lives by line, and Mr. Leigh has not yet developed a line unmistakably original, powerful and distinguished in itself. He has, as yet, a manner rather than a style. But it is a large, vigorous manner, one positively astonishing in a craftsman of his age, and, above all things, it rests, as upon a firm foundation, on that virtue to which we have just alluded. Mr. Leigh feels and respects the quality of masonry, the dignity and beauty of sheer mass. He has got miles away from the lacelike foible of his predecessors. He sees his buildings for what they are, great embodiments of character. He sees the grandeur that lies in bulk and he knows how to leave it alone, if we may so express it, to let it speak for itself. Sometimes his compositions are a little teased, a little crowded. Cogitation over the lithographs of Whistler would have taught him something here, and from two such draftsmen as different as Pennell and Brangwyn—at their best—he might have learned to hold his hand when drawing some of his heavily sculptured Gothic arches. But these redundancies of his are comparatively rare. In the main he maintains the simplicity of what we would call his best print, "An Ancient Street," drawn at Château Thierry. In this his boldness is altogether successful. It illustrates the broad merit of his work. He has seen his buildings picturesquely but truthfully; he has seen their purely architectural dignity, and he has interpreted this with a new and interesting touch. Time will doubtless give greater purity to his line and greater subtlety to his distribution of light and shade. Meanwhile he makes the kind of start that is half the battle.

Sane Modernism

Mr. C. R. W. Nevinson Sees a Light

When the art of Mr. C. R. W. Nevinson was first made known in this city a year or so ago through some of his lithographs and paintings, two points about him were easily apprehended. One was that he had a manual dexterity with which he could probably do almost anything he chose. The other was that he had chosen to give a good deal of attention to those modernist theories which are especially allied to the Cubists and Futurists. His love of abstract notions seemed unfortunate. It was threatening to dislocate a real talent. Now we take it that he has seen a light. There is an exhibition of his paintings, etchings, lithographs and woodcuts at the Bourgeois gallery, including a lot of things he has lately produced. It shows that between native talent and muddling theory talent has come out on top, incidentally clarifying the muddle.

His is to-day the sanest modernism which has come under our observation. The catalogue contains a chronology and a "Creed," but we may be pardoned if we ignore these nominal aids to comprehension and Mr. Hind's friendly preface, looking simply to what Mr. Nevinson has done. Possibly he has himself still a lot of theories about it, but what he has done seems to amount to nothing more than a wholesome process of giving nature a chance, letting the immemorial laws of art unconsciously influence him and humor a bit his Cubistic fancies. These last, indeed, seem actually to help him a little. That is to say, they add a certain piquant interest to his impressions, so that when he comes to paint our skyscrapers or the weblike cabling of the Brooklyn Bridge or the shadowy pattern thrown by the elevated railway, his Cubism serves to accentuate his play of line and does it not unpleasantly. What we like best about the show is the suggestion it gives of a man visualizing things with zest and painting them with a painter's ability. The color and movement of life get into his canvases. They do so alike when he paints gesticulating crowds in "The Curb Market" or a vivid type of femininity in his "Portrait of Comtesse de———." His eyes are open for stirring and sometimes beautiful effects, whether it is on the Riviera or on Broadway. In short, he is functioning as an artist, with a sense of color and with real skill at the tips of his fingers. He refuses in his "Creed" to be associated with an ism. That is good. Some day he will find out that even his momentarily, accidentally, useful Cubism is just an ism.

Degas

The Promise of a Memorable Sale

Since the death of Degas and the prodigious sale in Paris of the multitude of works he left behind him, we have had a few tantalizing glimpses of the treasures of his studio. Presently we are to enjoy something like a representative display, gathered from that unique source. It will come in the new year at the American Art Galleries, where there will be placed on exhibition no fewer than seventy-one souvenirs of the master obtained at the sale mentioned above by the Parisian antiquarian, M. Jacques Seligmann. It appears that he had intended to assemble these works in a gallery to be built at his place in the country, a gallery for modern pictures, but he had to give up this idea because of the scarcity of materials and labor and so decided to sell, wisely choosing the American market. The pictures come to this country with written guaranties from the experts of the Degas sale. M. Durand-Ruel, for example, alludes to the precautions taken to prevent the touching-up of any of these relics. Here, in fact, is a diversified group of the works of Degas in their purest, most characteristic state.

A collection of photographs enables us to see with what fullness these paintings and pastels mirror the traits of the artist. Not one of them is neglected. One of the most important and beautiful pieces included is a souvenir of that early period in which he was under the influence of Ingres, "The Daughter of Jephtha." It has a companion in a study of "Young Spartans at Wrestling Exercise," a striking group of nudes. Some of the portraits, too, seem to be of early dates; one of them, "Portrait in White," an impression of a woman on a divan, the photograph makes us long to see. There is a curious sketch in the lot which stands by itself, "Children and Ponies in a Park," and another notable composition is one of "Mlle. Fiocre dans le Ballet de la Source," an episode of pure enchantment. The rest of these numerous works fall into certain well filled categories. One is devoted to the ballet, another to the racecourse, another to the milliners, and still another—a voluminous one—to those toilet scenes in which Degas was wont to study form, not always beautiful, and to make it the occasion for brilliant draftsmanship. It is interesting to reflect, as one turns over all these photographs, on the human nature in which Degas saturated his art, for all that he was so passionately the technician, so resolute in his refusal to "tell a story." He would not dramatize his types, yet there is drama in them, the drama latent in every soul. Degas was a Balzac in spite of himself. This collection will be shown for the first time in New York on January 22. On the evening of the 27th it will be taken up to the Plaza and sold there. Not all winter long will there be in the auction room a more exciting occasion.

Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions

There will be placed on view tomorrow at the Durand Ruel gallery a collection of the works of Miss Mary Cassatt. It will remain until December 4. At the Arden gallery there begins next Thursday a holiday exhibition of paintings by five other American ladies—Susanna Bottomley, Maria Oakey Dewing, Theodosia de R. Hawley, Laura Coombs Hills and Agnes H. Lincoln.

In view of Zorn's recent death and the revival of interest in his work, collectors will be glad to know that a complete catalogue of his etchings is

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